

The first and second records of the Short-Tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* for the Malay Peninsula and other *Puffinus* records

by P. R. Colston

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A live example of the Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*, more commonly referred to as the Tasmanian "Mutton-bird", was hand caught by a local fisherman from the sea surface at midnight near Koh Mai Torn Island, off Phuket Island, W. Peninsula Thailand on 2 May 1977. Mr. C. B. Frith prepared a skin of the bird and kindly presented it to the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) - BMNH Reg. No. 1979.6.1. He states that a second bird of this species was caught at the same locality in similar fashion on 10 May 1977. These are the first and second records for the Malay Peninsula.

The BMNH bird is a ♀ measuring approximately 340 mm in length, wing 258 mm, tail 83 mm, culmen 32 mm, tarsus 52 mm, middle toe and claw 63 mm. Its skull is fully ossified. The plumage is wholly dark brownish-black above, with black wing and tail quills, slightly paler below with greyish under-wing coverts; tail short and rounded. The slender beak is leaden grey; tarsus blackish-grey to purple-grey, claws lead-grey.

This shearwater breeds only in Australia and the Tasmanian islands. It is a trans-equatorial migrant, whose migration route has been determined from sight and specimen records, confirmed by recoveries of ringed birds (Serventy *et al.* 1971). Young birds start their migration in the latter part of April or early May. Breeders and immatures fly quickly northwards across the Equator into the North Pacific and Arctic Oceans. During June-August the main wintering area is in southern Kamchatka, the Aleutians and the Arctic Ocean to 71° N.

The occurrence of *Puffinus* spp. in the Malacca Straits is, according to Medway & Wells (1976), limited to one record, by Allen, of a group of medium-sized, dark shearwaters with graduated tails, tentatively identified as *P. pacificus* or *P. carneipes*. These were seen on 4 August 1950 at the north end of the Malacca Straits (6° N, 98° E). On 10 July 1963, when I was returning from Australia to the U.K. I identified 15 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters *P. pacificus* in approximately the same area at the north end of the Malacca Straits. In my field notes I noted at the time (0830-0930, sea rough with squalls) that they were narrow-winged medium-sized *puffinus*, dark chocolate brown above and below (one or two pale phase birds were also present). I had close views of several and identified them as *P. pacificus* by their long wedged-shaped tails, slender dark bills and their lighter build compared with either *P. tenuirostris* or the larger Pale-footed Shearwater *P. carneipes*. Several more Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were encountered later in the day further northwest in the Andaman Sea. The first Pale-footed Shearwaters were sighted 6 days later in rough seas on 16 July near Bombay. I know all 3 species well from earlier voyages or in the vicinity of their breeding grounds around Australia in subsequent years.

The interesting presence of *P. tenuirostris* during May in Thai-Malay waters may indicate that small numbers pass undetected through the South China

sea on their way north, possibly becoming displaced by storms together with other widely ranging Australian *Puffinus* species. On the other hand they may be first-year birds which become "lost" and attach themselves to migrating flocks of Pale-footed Shearwaters.

Serventy *et al.* (1971) cite 2 individuals obtained in the northern Indian Ocean in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, both in May.

References:

- Allen, E. F. 1951. Two new birds in the Straits of Malacca. *Malay Nat. J.* 5: 155-157.
 Medway, Lord & Wells, D. R. 1976. *The Birds of the Malay Peninsula*. V. Conclusion and Survey of every species. Witherby: London.
 Serventy, D. L., Serventy, V. S. & Warham, J. 1971. *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*. Reed: Sydney.

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IN BRIEF

Mr H. G. Alexander writes commendably "in the interest of truth":—

'On page 8 of the centennial *Bulletin*, Mr Peal, telling of the curiously hesitant steps by which women were admitted to the Club, notes: "However, at the Meeting on 15 March 1911 Miss E. L. Turner is shown as a Visitor — one hopes she was allowed at the dinner first but that is not stated. She showed 34 slides and her presence must have been arranged well in advance; she came again in 1912". Well, the fact is she was *not* allowed to come to the dinner. She was a close neighbour of mine in Kent, and I knew her very well. In protest at the strange behaviour of the BOC officers, I went with her to get dinner somewhere else, and later we arrived at the restaurant (Pagani's, if I remember right), where we met the Duchess of Bedford, who was Miss Turner's personal friend (the only time I met her, as far as I can recollect); and the three of us remained in some ante-room till the men had finished their dinner — at least fifteen or twenty minutes, I think.'

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Harter, W. 1979. *Birds in Fact and Legend*. Pp. 1-128. Black and white drawings. The Oak Tree Press: London. £2.95.

A lighthearted look at tales of birds, true and untrue, popularly written, but with many facts as well as fancies, and illustrated with some pleasing line drawings.

Mackworth-Praed, C. W. & Grant, C. H. B. 1980. *African Handbook of Birds*. Series 1. *Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa*. Vols. 1 & 2. Publisher's note and Biographical note. Vol. 1. Pp. xxiv, 1-836. Vol. 2. Pp. xiv, 1-1113 + Index. Longmans: London. Vol. 1. £25. Vol. 2. £30.

A welcome reprint of the 1957 edition of this invaluable handbook, with unaltered text and illustrations and with the addition of 2 maps showing the changes in political boundaries since the book was first published. The publishers regret that the extensive revision needed and the incorporation of notes for future editions left by Col. Mackworth-Praed have not been able to be carried out. It might seem now that they never will be. Mrs. Pat Hall has been responsible for the informative and appreciative biographical note on the two authors, the value of whose work seems likely to endure well into and beyond a fourth decade.